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ABSTRACT

While the number of minority students in postsecondary education has climbed since 1970, the rates of minority graduation are still too low. Factors adding to the dropout rate include: inadequate finances, poor academic preparation, low motivation, poor study habits, low basic skills, and low institutional support. This paper describes support programs offered by three institutions to meet the needs of entering minority students. The report begins with a description of programs at Pima Community College, in Tucson, Arizona. Pima lists 16 strategies for maintaining achievement levels while reducing dropout rates. The Grant MacEwan Community College, in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, expresses concern for American Natives in Canada. Aside from the Indian students attending Grant MacEwan, the college also provides outreach courses to four Indian tribes in the area. The average Native student at the college is profiled, and the report describes a Native Support Group formed during the 1984-85 school year to fulfill emotional and practical needs of Native students. The group organizes field trips, activities and dinners. The existence of Native scholarships is noted and the eventual hiring of a Native counselor at the college is forecasted. In the mid-1960s, Brigham Young University, in Provo, Utah, created several basic education courses exclusively for minority students. While the program currently allows non-minority students to attend the smaller classes, minorities are still served by them. The university also has minority scholarships, academic advisors, ethnic studies, and ethnic student clubs. A bibliography is included. (TES)

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RETAIN WHO AND WHY

A presentation made at the Western College Reading and Learning Association Convention March, 1986

by

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MINORITY RETENTION

Introduction

The final report of the Study Group on The Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education claims that only half of those who begin their undergraduate education with the intent of earning a baccalaureate do so. If we were to restrict the population of that report to minorities, the ratio would be instead of one of each two who will graduate, more like one of each four.

We are currently in a time of declining student populations. The market for college-age students has dwindled while the costs of a college education continue to rise. Consequently, we can ill afford to lose through dropouts those that we have recruited and admitted.

Our concern here, therefore, is to look at ways that three different institutions have attempted to meet the needs of their entering minority students by introducing and implementing various kinds of support and intervention programs.

History

For the past couple of decades or so, many more minority students have sought higher education and have been encouraged to do so by the availability of PELL Grants, minority scholarships, tribal scholarships, and by the universities and colleges

themselves who have officially or unofficially adopted an affirmative-action-type recruiting and admission program.

Many of the entering minority students have been adequately prepared through their high school experience to compete on their own terms with the college experience. Others, because of inadequate skills, poor high school preparation, language adjustment, poor study habits, or lack of financial or parental support come to college poorly prepared and often poorly motivated. Exact figures on numbers admitted and numbers persisting to graduation are imprecise, since most institutions fail to distinguish minority students in their statistics. Without question, though, the number of minority students in post-high school education has climbed remarkably since 1970. Rates of persistence to graduation, however, are still far too low.

As more minority students have been admitted, many colleges have taken a new look at their policies and programs. As a result, most of them have made adaptations in their curriculum or in their support services to provide whatever academic and counseling help they can--especially for freshmen during their first, crucial year on campus. The prevailing hope is that in spite of whatever obstacles to academic success the individual minority student has to cope with, he will, at least, have a fighting chance to succeed in college competition. Yet many factors such as inadequate finances, poor academic preparation, unrealistic expectations, lack of career goals, lack of

motivation, poor study habits, lack of basic skills, lack of university support and commitment and homesickness continue to add to the dropout of minority students.

Following is a discussion outlining the adaptations made in three institutions of higher learning to combat the prevalence of minority student dropouts and to create better persistence toward the obtaining of a degree.

Pima Community College, Tucson, Arizona

As with every educational organization Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona, has concerned itself with two directions: a qualitative product which is sensitized to quantitative pursuits. That is to say, in its quest for educational excellence it must concern itself with the rate of attrition. For any excellent educational organization will cease to function if it fails to retain and reclaim its customers - the students.

At Pima Community a concerted college-wide effort initiated a new direction in the existing educational model. An examination of the Peters and Waterman eight attributes of excellence revealed ways to implement change in this multicampus district. The Peters-Waterman Model was utilized because it is a success-oriented model based on the methods and tenacious accomplishments of leading American organizations. The prevailing theme, "back to basics," suggests that successful organizations must sustain a common sense philosophy, caring

about those they serve.

Prima Community College was aware of innumerable factors that influence the future of the institution. Therefore, significant strategies for responding to changes were considered in the development of a long-range plan, called "A Blue-Print for Excellence." This plan included the following strategies:

1. General Education Requirement. The Pima College Governing Board mandated that graduating students must meet minimal requirements (12th grade reading level) as measured on an approved standard test.

2. Mandatory Assessment. Assessment of reading, writing and mathematics is a requirement for enrollment in the college. Other assessments include the TESOL, PPST and GED.

3. Readabilities. Analysis of reading levels of all textbooks and instructional materials is a readily available option to faculty; college catalogs have, in fact, been revised to lowered reading levels.

4. Community-Institutional Cooperatives. An ongoing community-based cooperative education program utilizes local agencies for on-the-job related training. Also, university transfer parallel and student referrals are other inter-institutional projects.

5. Alternative Learning Systems. Various learning strategies are utilized as an optional requirement throughout the college. These services include:

a. Alternative Learning Centers offer self-paced,

individualized, modularized and prescriptive learning through laboratory teaching in the three basics, reading, writing and mathematics.

b. Open-entry/Open-exit policy allows students to pursue course work on a flexible schedule.

c. Instructional Learning Centers provide self-paced learning for content subjects in mathematics/sciences, in social/behavioral sciences and in business/management programs.

d. Vocational Labs include Office Education, Life Sciences, Health Sciences, Automotive Technology, Welding Technology, Air Conditioning/Plumbing Technology, Machine Technology, Drafting Technology, Graphic and Advertising Technology.

6. Advisement System. Precollegiate services include referrals to specialists, telephone registration, orientations and an Upward Bound Program. Honors courses are an option for the gifted student.

7. Mandatory Placement. Such placement is currently being considered as a future strategy for monitoring population trends.

8. Policies. Faculty members are required to provide copies of attendance policies, grading policies, withdrawal policies, course syllabi and other requirements to each student.

9. Referral Services. Pima Community offers instructional assistance to special needs students, students of English as a Second Language, bilingual students and learning disabled

students. Special students are main-streamed and offered learning aids such as tutoring and peer assistants.

10. Computerized Registration. By using computerized registration, student records can be monitored, and a profile of test scores readily available to students, advisors and to individual instructors.

11. Computer-Assisted Instruction. Computer-assisted instruction is available in business courses, reading, mathematics, drafting and other areas. A new computer laboratory is an optional mode for content subject usage. Another computer lab is used for computer science courses.

12. Audiovisual Modes. Audiovisual modes of instruction are prevalent in most subject areas, including television, slide-tapes and reading machines. Life sciences, automotive technology, office education, reading, mathematics, writing, languages, psychology and humanities are some areas using a completely automated instructional process.

13. Attendance Alert. Each instructor monitors the class attendance of his students. Official written notices and telephone calls alert probable dropouts to college action.

Student Retention

14. Future Plans. The college plans to initiate midterm grade reports, an appeals process for grade petitions, conversion of non-credit course work to credits, and uniformity of

multicampus standards for all programs.

15. Instructional Assistants. Student assistants are the strength of innovative programs mentioned herein. Laboratory assistants provide the main source of help in every laboratory. Student aides and instructional aides made individual attention and tutoring possible.

16. Support Services. In addition to the aforementioned planned directions, Pima Community has the support of these internal agents: a development education committee, a faculty council, program evaluation, faculty evaluation, student evaluation of instruction, multicampus subject area committees, faculty development programs (professional leaves, credit for study, incentive awards), faculty-administrator retreats and financial aid (local/state/federal funding).

Summary

Pima College is a multicampus district institution which offers its members variegated programs and services. The primary mission of the College may be described as follows: to provide a qualitative education that permeates the needs of the individual--the ability to function effectively in a high-tech society.

Grant MacEwan Community College, Edmonton, Alberta

Rationale

Grant MacEwan Community College is concerned about improving

the quality of life of Native people in Canada. To achieve this end, it must encourage and help them to participate in all aspects of society especially in those areas of greatest concern to them.

One major area is education. The objective of any educational program is to develop knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes so that people will be self-confident, capable and committed to setting goals, to making informed choices, and to acting in ways that will improve their own lives as well as any others living in communities throughout the country. Native people or any other minority group should not be denied the opportunity to pursue an adequate education.

Overview

Grant MacEwan Community College is located in the provincial capital of Edmonton - population over 532,000. Established in 1971, the college is composed of three campuses in three corners of the city. The student enrollment for the 1983-84 term was nearly 3600 full-time participants. Part-time learners number over 12,000 in credit and non-credit courses. Students range in age from 17 years to 50+. There is a larger proportion of females than males--almost two to one. Seventy-four percent of the students come from the Edmonton area. Only two percent of the total enrollment are foreign students (59). Between 60 and 70 Native students are presently attending GMCC in the city. The College also provides outreach courses to four Indian bands

(tribes) in the immediate vicinity (75 mile radius), Paul Reserve, Alexis-Stony reserve, Alexander Reserve, and Enoch-Cree Reserve. As well, the College has gone further afield to provide courses in remote areas in Northern Alberta such as Saddle Lake, Blue Quills/St. Paul, Lac La Biche, and Lesser Slave Lake.

Generally speaking, the employment status for College graduates is quite good. In 1983, 74 percent were employed in positions related to their college education while 12 percent were continuing their education at the same college, technical institute or university.

Characteristics of The Native Student at Grant MacEwan Community College:

- age mid-20's to late 30's
- more women than men
- women generally the single parent
- high school dropout (before grade 10)
- weak in communication skills (for some, English is a second language)
- come from a reserve or small community; not an urban dweller
- depend almost entirely on the government for financial support
- enroll in Early Childhood Development, Social Service Worker and Child Care Worker programs and Native Communications

Persistence

During the 1984-85 school term a Native Support Group was formed. Organized by one of the College counselors, it is now in its second year of operation and turning out to be a valuable service to Native students. The group meets every Monday during the semester between 12:30 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. on an informal, drop-in basis in the Grant MacEwan Room. Coffee is provided and participants are encouraged to bring lunches. This year, as a result of a certain camaraderie, social outings off campus such as field trips and a visit to a Native Cultural School have been undertaken. The counselor has also held two potluck suppers in her home.

There is every indication that this Native Support Group is fulfilling emotional as well as practical needs to Native students attending this College. Group problems are shared and discussed. Individual counseling is also available. Having a place to go to or a person to listen to has reduced some of the anxiety experienced by these students in particular. The immediate response to drop out when problems appear to be insurmountable is frequently allayed.

The highlight this year was participation by these students and children from the Ben Calf Robe Program in Edmonton in the second annual Grant MacEwan Day celebration. The youngsters, accompanied by the pervasive beating of drums, performed a number of colorful dances while an elder narrated stories for the

audience. It was a moving spectacle especially when Dr. MacEwan and others were invited to join in the Friendship Dance.

Another indication of achievement this year was the awarding of three scholarships to deserving Native students.

Forecast

The continuity of this Native Support Group in the College seems secure. The next step will likely be the appointment of a Native counselor or Elder on site. The request for such an individual has been proposed for a number of years now. There are still some internal disputes to be resolved before the appropriate agencies (i.e. government) will fund this position.

On a positive note, however, plans are underway for Native Awareness Days at the College next fall to alert students and staff to the presence of Native students on campus. These students, too, can make positive contributions to our society and, given the educational tools, can meet the challenges of the future.

MINORITY RETENTION AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

Although BYU has for the past several years operated on a closed admission basis, we have had special dispensation to admit minority students at levels below the normal minimum admission standards. In fact, minority student applications are screened by a committee of faculty and administrators from the Multicultural Office and recommendations made to the Admission Office. Although most of the minority students applying now are within the guidelines prescribed by the University for admittance, hundreds of minority students over the past two decades have been admitted with credentials from high school that may have prohibited admission. Many others, although admitted with above-minimum standards, have been within the low tenth or twentieth percentile of all students admitted. This report is concerned with the multitude of challenges we--students, staff, and faculty--all faced, the adaptations we consequently made, and the success we had.

Courses

In the middle sixties, concerned about a high rate of dropouts among the minority students, BYU hired a number of faculty members to work exclusively with minority students. Their task was to teach basic general education courses in

English, math, biology, history, chemistry, physics, sociology, etc. Enrollment in these special sections was limited primarily to minority students and the class size severely restricted. However, since these sections were on a "recommended" basis only to minority students, no students were under obligation to enroll in these sections and many non-minority students, finding the sections smaller in number and more personal, drifted in. This practice is still in effect today, although the faculty members are now administered out of their own academic disciplines. Today's class schedules indicate, but do not restrict in any way, certain general education sections as "Multicultural." These sections use the same textbooks and the same syllabi as the other sections but are limited in class size.

The advantages for the minority student here are at least fourfold. First, he has a small class where it is easier for him to get more personal attention. Second, he has an instructor who is either a minority or has worked for long periods with minority students. Third, the student has the opportunity to mingle with and get acquainted with other minority students. And, finally, he is working with an instructor who is, to some degree at least, cognizant of minority learning styles and cultural background. Consequently, he has exposure to some important factors that should help in the retention process: peer association and personal acquaintance with support of interested faculty members.

Labs

Although the University has large writing and reading labs administered by the English Department, an equally large, but separate lab, administered by the Math Department, and numerous small departmental labs scattered across campus, the Multicultural Office maintains a rather small but very personalized study lab and tutoring area manned by upper-division and graduate minority students. The lab is small enough to give personalized attention to students who need help and is limited to those students of minority status. Its proximity to the other offices of the Multicultural staff contributes to its use and supervision. Since the Multicultural Office reports to the Dean of Student Life, the other support services of the College of Student Life are also available for minority students. These services include a complete, up-to-date career exploration laboratory, and a reading and study skills laboratory, which sponsors a series of mini-workshops on note taking, listening, test taking, textbook reading, and related skills.

Financial Aids

Although the University has a large Financial Aids and Scholarship Office, a Financial Aids Office for minority students is also maintained. This office coordinates all Tribal funding for Native American students, all foundation, corporate, and donor grants, endowments, and scholarships for minority students, PELL grant applications, and all BYU grants for minority

students. In addition, this office has budgeted funds for approximately sixty part-time student employment positions. These positions are spread throughout the University ranging from positions in University libraries to graduate assistantships to teachers aides to secretarial/clerical to custodial. The positions are limited to minority students who have verified financial need and who have the skills required to staff a particular position.

The Multicultural Financial Aids Office is staffed by three full-time and some part-time help and assists, in some capacity or other, over 1200 different students annually.

Since financial problems are often considered as a major cause of dropouts for minority students, the availability of an office whose sole function is assisting them in locating and securing grants, scholarships, and part-time employment is a truly valuable retention device.

Academic Advisement

One of the more successful innovations--and persistence insurers--that we have attempted is an office designed and equipped to offer academic advice. The intent of this office is to assist minority students in selecting their courses for registration and gong through the registration, add-drop cycle. In addition, the office, through its computer tie-in with the Records Office of the University, can immediately check on a student's registration, making sure that each minority student is

remaining eligible for PELL grants and scholarships (through minimum credit hours completed and minimum GPA) and making satisfactory progress toward completion of general education courses and toward the major and minor requirements for a degree.

Since these searches are periodically monitored by the staff of this office, students who have not declared majors, who are registered for too few credit hours, or who are in trouble with grades can be invited in for consultation at an early enough time to correct the problems.

For those minority students already placed on University academic warning or probation, this office conducts a mid-semester telephone check with each instructor to determine status academically for the student and then, if necessary, contacts the student directly.

Although this monitoring may seem somewhat offensive and even meddling, it has been very successful in keeping students funded and in keeping them moving toward the completion of a degree. Actually, we have received no complaints from the students, who appreciate the personal efforts to keep them academically and financially eligible.

Summer Entry

Since the summer of 1970, we have offered summer programs, designed to bridge the high school and university experience. Over the years we have evolved from a single summer program to a series of programs, varying in length from two weeks to eight

weeks and with different objectives and purposes. For example, this last summer we had five separate programs on-going: a two-week campus program for minority students who had completed their tenth grade of high school; a computer-engineering type program for high school juniors that ran for eight weeks and carried some college credit; a four-week orientation to college life programs for high-school juniors; and a four-week program for high school seniors, designed as an orientation-adjustment experience for entering minority freshmen at BYU and a restricted-by-GPA program for academically gifted entering college minority students, which ran eight weeks, carried college credit, and operated on our Honors Program model.

By bringing these students on campus early, by giving them an acquaintance with the campus and the multitude of supporting services, by showing them ways to cut the red tape of officialdom, by giving them the opportunity to create friendships with peers and with faculty and staff members, we have found that persistence and graduation rates are enhanced tremendously; some of our follow-up studies indicate a graduation rate double or triple national averages.

NAS

Although our Black Studies program is struggling and our Latin American Studies program only moderately successful, we have had since 1975 a very successful Native American Studies program, actually offering a minor. We have no questions but

what such ethnically designed programs attract and hold students on campus. Also, we have relied heavily on ethnic clubs and ethnic days or weeks as retention devices. Currently we have Native American, Hispanic, Black, and Polynesian clubs in operation, as well as several International student clubs.

The opportunities to mingle with peers, to become involved in club organizations, meeting, and activities, and to gain experience and exposure are, in themselves, factors instrumental in student persistence.

Summary

We have tried then to encourage and support through smaller, more personalized classes, minority or minority/sensitive faculty, special labs, a minority financial aids office, financial support, a minority academic advisement office, social clubs, work study opportunities, and awareness days or weeks. This has been for us a comprehensive and effective approach.

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